



Virginia Intercommunity Transition Council
A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

VITC

Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

WORK INCENTIVE AND BENEFITS PLANNING

Why is Benefits Counseling Important?

Early education about disability benefits is an important aspect of successful transition planning for students with disabilities moving from school to work. Since a number of transition - age students receive or may be eligible to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, increased knowledge about SSI work incentives that are available to them will better prepare transitioning youth for addressing health care and benefits coverage as they move toward employment and independent living.

The Role of Benefits Counselors

The Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) project, funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA), is a cooperative agreement program designed to disseminate accurate information to SSA's beneficiaries with disabilities about work incentives to better enable them to make informed choices about their employment future.

Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) are an essential resource for students, their parents or guardians, and those involved in transition planning. Each WIPA organization has CWICs available free of charge.

CWICs can provide:

- Work incentives planning and assistance to prepare students for work or to help ensure needed benefits;
- Counseling to eliminate fear of losing benefits due to in school or post school employment; and
- Counseling on use of SSA work incentives to save resources for personal employability investment accounts before a student graduates.

Suggestions for Transition Practitioners

Transition Practitioners can help integrate SSI and work incentives into the transition planning process in the following actions:

- Become aware of current programs and knowledgeable enough to pass on the basic information.
- Know which students receive SSA benefits now or will likely need such benefits in the future. Let the students and their families know that there are advantages to financial planning prior to graduation.
- Inform students and parents that Benefits Counselors are available to them. Provide contact information for SSA and Medicaid.
- Assist students and parents in the SSI application process and provide appropriate documentation on a student's disability, limitations, performance, and behaviors that will help SSA determine or re-determine eligibility.

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- Maintain contact information for the local SSA office to facilitate communication among students, parents, school personnel, adult service providers, and SSA staff.
- Provide all students, 14 to 22 years of age, and their families with WIPA contact information for their areas. Encourage students and families to make contact with a CWIC, or attend an upcoming WIPA or other benefits planning orientation session.

Frequently Asked Questions

What can benefits planning do for students?

- Benefits planning can help families avoid the loss of SSI benefits without warning and avoid payback situations. Benefits planning can allow students to save resources for a vocationally related goal, such as a job coach or a car, and increase family aspirations and expectations for employment.

What is “deeming” and how can a student save or spend some of his or her cash benefits for a vocational goal?

- Deeming, an SSA concept, means that some of the parents’ or spouse’s income or resources are considered as part of the student’s available resources and income, and therefore reduces the student’s cash benefit.
- Some families are reluctant to consider allowing the student to work for fear of losing cash benefits and/or Medicaid health care coverage.
- Deeming stops the month after a child turns age 18. Therefore, a child who could not receive SSI because of deeming may be able to get SSI when he or she turns age 18.

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Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Projects In Virginia

Virginia Association of Community Rehabilitation Programs/vaACCSES

Information Central: 571-339-1305
Toll Free outside of Northern Virginia Area: 1-877-877-2777
By E-Mail: Mmorrison@vaaccses.org
Monroe@careersupport.net ktefelski@vaaccses.org
By Webpage: www.vaACCSES.org

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